

# Our Way of Proceeding in Education: The *Ratio Studiorum*

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## 1 The origins of the *Ratio*

### A little history

Four centuries ago, on 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1599 to be exact, Giacomo Domenichi, Secretary of the Society, promulgated by mandate of General Claudio Aquaviva and sent to all the provinces the document entitled *Ratio atque institutio studiorum Societatis Jesu*, or *Plan of Studies of the Society of Jesus*. This was the first document on pedagogy approved by the General of the society for all the educational establishments of the Order. This was the birth certificate for the famous Jesuit educational system, which evolved with such consistency and sense of unity throughout the world until the suppression of the Society in 1773.

The *Ratio* did not arise by spontaneous generation. Ignatius of Loyola had already treated the subject of studies in Part IV of the *Constitutions*, where we find a series of principles and norms for the universities, schools and educational establishments of the Society. But Ignatius did not descend into many details. One of his principles was to always adapt to the concrete reality: 'adjustments may be introduced according to place, time and persons.'<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the *Constitutions* defer to a more detailed 'separate document' on this topic to follow later.

The treatise which Ignatius announced, and which the recently established schools were demanding insistently, did not arrive until some forty years after his death. Nevertheless, already during the life of Ignatius sprung up various *Ratio* and instructions for studies, since, following the principle of adaptation, Ignatius left the Rectors of the schools free to prepare their own plans of studies, while awaiting the promulgation of the announced common norms. Even as early as 1541, we find a profusion of such documents (Charters of Colleges, Constitutions of the College of Padua, Industriae, Constitutions of Colleges), all these even before the publication of the *Constitutions* of the Society. Ignatius took these into consideration in the preparation of Part IV of the *Constitutions*. These documents refer mostly to the studies of the Jesuits themselves and not directly to those for non-Jesuit students.

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<sup>1</sup> *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* n.455

## The first plan of studies: the College of Messina (1548)

The documents which most influenced the preparation of the *Ratio* were those of the establishments for *extern* (ie. non-Jesuit) students, principally the College of Messina (1548). It was in Messina that the educational work of the Society with non-Jesuit students began; although it is certain that a little bit earlier, in the early days of the University of Gandía and in the college which was confided to them in Goa, the Jesuits had already entered into the education of *externs*.

Messina is considered to be the first college and prototype<sup>2</sup> of the subsequent colleges of the Society because of the importance of the experience which began there and the influence which the plan of studies of Messina had upon all subsequent norms of the Society which refer to studies.

The author of this plan of studies (the *Constitutions of the College of Messina*) was the Majorcan, Jerome Nadal (1507-80). The document of Messina spread forth like fire through the first colleges of the Society and came close to becoming *the* plan of studies for the entire Society. Ignatius himself, in 1550, considered the possibility of approving the *Constitutions of Messina*, extending them to all the schools of the Society.

The plan of studies of Messina did not become the *Ratio* for the whole Order but it had an extraordinary influence on the preparation on the *Ratio* of 1599. The channel for this was the Roman College, founded by Ignatius in 1551, where this plan of studies of Messina was adopted. Due to its importance and location, the Roman College was destined to develop in its turn into the undisputed model for all the schools of the Society, and the centre for the irradiation of Jesuit pedagogy in all the world.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Primum ac prototypum'

In 1558, two years after the death of Ignatius, was published the *Ratio Studiorum Collegii Romani*, or the *Plan of Studies of the Roman College*, which was to serve as the model for the rest of the schools of the Society. The Roman College, where the most eminent humanists, theologians, philosophers, and the best corps of professors of the Society were concentrated, became the mother and seed-bed for all the other schools, and a true pedagogical laboratory for the entire Order. It was there that the *Ratio* was born.

## The precursor of the *Ratio*: Jerome Nadal

Jerome Nadal was the man who contributed first and most to establish the pedagogy in the Society. Nadal was also a key figure in the diffusion of this pedagogy throughout the schools. Named Commissioner, by Ignatius of Loyola, for Spain and Portugal (1553), Nadal established order in the schools of those countries, which had not had a well-defined programme. The watchword was to follow the *modus docendi* (method of teaching) of Messina and the Roman College.

Shortly after his return to Rome in 1554, he was named Vicar General of all the Society, the right hand of Ignatius for the governance of the Order. In the following year, he was designated Commissioner General to promulgate the *Constitutions* of the Society in Italy, Austria, and in other regions. Jerome Nadal took advantage of his role and his journeys spread the 'way of teaching' proper to the Society.

Sent again to Germany in 1562, he drew up, the following year, the *Ordo Studiorum Germanicus*, which is an adaptation for Germany of the programme of the Roman College. In 1564, we find him again in Rome, as Superintendent of the Roman College, working on a new plan of studies.

Jerome Nadal can rightly be considered the founder of Jesuit pedagogy since he laid the foundations upon which the entire scholarly

edifice of the Society of Jesus was to rise. Nadal is more responsible than anyone else for the establishment of the network of schools of the early Society which, little by little, acquired a common face. The profusion of rules and instructions which he went about leaving in all parts would serve later as the basis for the definitive *Ratio*.

### The source of Jesuit pedagogy: the method of Paris

What did Nadal use to write the first plan of studies for the Society? He certainly did not invent it, but rather took it from somewhere else. Nadal himself recognizes its origins.

The method which is followed in Messina is 'the method of Paris' (*modus Parisiensis*) 'because it is among all the most exact and the most useful.' It is necessary to go back a few years to understand the importance which the University of Paris had in all of the pedagogy of the Society since its beginnings.

Ignatius narrates in his autobiography that, after having made his studies in Alcalá and Salamanca in a most disorganized way, 'he decided to go to Paris to study.'<sup>3</sup> Alone and on foot, he made his way to Paris where he arrived on a cold day in February 1528. 'And he went to study humanities at Montaigu . . . He studied with children following the order and method of Paris.'<sup>4</sup>

It must not be forgotten that the first Jesuits all studied and were recruited by Ignatius at the University of Paris. From its very beginnings, the Society of Jesus bears the stamp of Paris. The bull of approval of the Society emphasized the fact that the Companions were 'masters of arts and graduates of the University of Paris.'<sup>5</sup> All of them kept very good memories of the university, which they considered always as the *alma mater* of the Society.

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<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography* n.71

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography* n.73

<sup>5</sup> Pope Paul III, *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae*, 27<sup>th</sup> September 1540

Ignatius especially was very grateful to the university in which he had finally been able to finish his studies, at no less than 43 years of age. When his brother asked his advice about where to send his son, Millan Loyola, to study, Ignatius did not hesitate one moment: Paris. 'He will make more progress here in four years than in any other that I know of in six.'<sup>6</sup> It is not strange, therefore, that in the moment in which the Society decided to opt for a concrete pedagogical method, it decided in favour of 'the manner called 'of Paris', where the Society first studied and knows the manner which is followed there.'

If it were necessary to summarize in a few words the principle characteristics of the 'manner of Paris', we would describe them as follows:

- Good order in the studies, arranged in a systematic and progressive form.
- Separation and gradation of the subject matter.
- Settled duration of courses and examinations for the mastery of each of them.
- Insistence on the necessity of establishing good foundations before going ahead.
- The division of students into classes according to their levels of knowledge.
- Abundance and frequency of exercises, with great activity on the part of the students.
- The use of emulation.
- Strict discipline and regimentation of student life.
- Study of the liberal arts with a humanistic and renaissance content with a Christian inspiration.
- Insistence upon joining virtue with letters.<sup>7</sup>

Some of these elements may seem obvious to us today. But they were not so obvious in

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Beltrán de Loyola, February 1542

<sup>7</sup> cf. *Constitutions* n.424: the Rector 'should strive to promote their progress in virtues and learning'.

their time, when the Jesuits thought that the 'manner of Paris' was so appropriate and advantageous. Many of these points from the 'manner of Paris' are similar to various methodological aspects that we find in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, especially in the *Annotations*. Ignatius did not study in Paris in vain.

### Jesuits and Protestants: a strange similarity

But the Jesuits were not the only ones who had studied in Paris. Within the same classrooms and, in some cases, in the same schools frequented by the Jesuits, passed, more or less in the same years, Calvin, Johannes Sturm, André de Gouveia, and numerous other humanists caught up in the cause of the Reformation. They also were becoming familiarized with manner of Paris.

It is therefore not strange that when the Reformers who had studied in Paris began to open their own schools, their establishments also bore the mark of Paris. The programmes of the Protestant schools of Bordeaux, Strassbourg, Geneva, Nîmes, and Lausanne, which were opened a bit before Messina, present a strange similarity with the programme of the latter school. And the same may be said of the other later Jesuit schools, created according to the model of Messina and the Roman College.

To this should be added the fact that both the Jesuits and the Reformers, in and outside of Paris, experienced in diverse ways the influence of the *Devotio Moderna*, a spiritual current which originated in the Low Countries with Gerard Groote (14<sup>th</sup> Century) and was spread by the fraternity of the Brothers of the Common Life, who themselves created an entire network of schools in the Low Countries and in Germany. The spiritual and pedagogical movement of the Brothers also had an important impact in Paris, above all through the College of Montaigu, where Ignatius studied. In reality, many of the pedagogical elements of the manner of Paris

come from the Brothers. The schools founded by the Reformer Melanchthon in Germany find themselves also within the renaissance humanism of the Brothers. This is another reason that explains many concrete similarities between the pedagogies of the Jesuits and the Protestants.

For years this resemblance fed the controversy as to whether it was the Jesuits who had plagiarized the Protestants, or vice versa. Today it is clear that it is not precisely a matter of plagiarism. Jesuits and Protestants were drinking from the same sources, which were the manner of Paris and the current of the Brothers of the Common Life. This explains the family resemblance.

Nevertheless, neither the Jesuits nor the Protestants had a monopoly on the manner of Paris since other schools, lay and communal, took their inspiration from Paris. But there is no doubt that the most consistent adaptations of the manner of Paris were those made, each separately, by the Jesuits and the Protestants. And that the systematization made by the Jesuits, especially through the *Ratio*, was unquestionably the most successful and the one which was most widespread.

The originality of the Jesuits was not so much in the elements which they included in the plan of studies (many of which coincide with those of the Protestants) but rather the manner in which they used these same elements to construct a new educational project of worldwide scope. In conclusion, the originality of the *Ratio* is not in its mere literality but in the inspiration which animates it, which is the same spirit which moulds the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus, and the conception of the world, of the human being, and of God which are presented by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola.

## 2 The different versions of the *Ratio*

### The *Ratio Borgiana* (1565-72)

The elaboration of the definitive *Ratio* of 1599 was a very laborious process. Diego Laínez, the successor of Ignatius as General of the Society, did not forget the promise of Ignatius to provide the schools with certain norms, and entrusted the preparation of the work to the Roman College. He himself compiled several rules for extern students (1561) which were much appreciated in their time. It seems that it was Laínez who gave to Ignatius the idea of having schools for externs. A multitude of rules and instructions date from this epoch.

For four years, a commission worked on the compilation of certain norms which were sent to the provinces in 1569, already during the generalate of St Francis Borgia. This is the first *Ratio* strictly speaking, known as the *Ratio Studiorum Borgiana*, and was published in several stages. The defect of this *Ratio* was that it said *what* should be done in the schools but did not say *how*.

The *Ratio Borgiana* treated the study of the humanities but omitted references to the study of philosophy and theology. One of the problems which occurred since the beginning in the redaction of the different versions of the *Ratio* was precisely that of determining the doctrine that the Society should uphold in its schools, especially regarding theology. Should liberty of opinion be allowed so that the professors might express their own points of view more freely? Or should the theological opinions to be held be spelled out? The question was not a negligible one. On it would depend whether the schools of the Society would teach a uniform doctrine or if liberty of instruction would be allowed. The topic bristled with difficulties, especially in the context of the diffusion of the doctrines of Luther.

The controversy lasted for years and made the redaction of the *Ratio* difficult. Four hundred years ago, the problem of how to combine orthodoxy and the security of doctrine on the one hand, with freedom of opinion on the other, was already in place. Themes such as justification, predestination, or the philosophy of Averroës, were then of burning relevance.

### The *Ratio* of 1586

Time passed and the provinces were demanding a definitive version of the *Ratio* which would settle, once and for all, the question of freedom of opinion. The new General, Claudio Aquaviva, made the theme a high priority of his administration.

Again the question was whether it would be good to compile a list of propositions which were to be prescribed or prohibited, and whether it would be good that the Society wedded as the only doctrine the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas. Old Alfonso Salmerón, one of the first Companions of Ignatius, wisely opined that it would be better not to restrict themselves to one particular doctrine, not even that of St Thomas Aquinas, because of the difficulties which could derive from this.

In 1582, Aquaviva named a commission of six experts from diverse nations to work in Rome on the redaction of the *Ratio*. The good fathers compiled no less than 597 propositions relative to the doctrine which the Society should follow. The professors of the Roman College rejected them and, with good sense, reduced them to 130.

Eventually, in April of 1586, Aquaviva promulgated the *Ratio* generally considered as the 'first' version of the *Ratio*, although in reality the Borgia version had preceded it, as we have said. The text did not pretend to be a definitive version but only a provisional working document and an 'intermediate' text to be sent to the provinces to be examined for six months, and so that observations could be sent to Rome. This explains why very few



copies were printed and why the General, once the final version was promulgated in 1599, instructed that any remaining copies of this earlier edition be burned.

The Ratio of 1586 consists of two parts. The first refers to the *Selection of Opinions* which are to be held in the Society's teaching. The second is the *Practice and Order of Studies* and refers to the order in which the studies should follow from theology and philosophy to the humanities. This second part does not contain juridical rules or didactic norms but rather a series of rather general considerations regarding diverse themes of a scholarly nature and are therefore not as practical as their title suggests.

The response of the provinces to the document was negative, particularly regarding the way that the *Selection of Opinions* was compiled. It was evident that the first part of the document was very restrictive and that the second part was very vague. The general opinion was that the document should be completely redone, both the speculative and the practical parts. Besides this, the document had aroused the attention of the Spanish Inquisition which confiscated all the copies. The question ended up in the Holy Office in Rome, from which it left free of all suspicion.

### The Ratio of 1591

After the ill-fortune of the Ratio of 1586, the process repeated itself. After receiving the remarks of the provinces at the end of the same year, a commission of three fathers began to prepare a new document. The theme of the *Selection of Opinions* was prepared by Stefano Tucci. At the end of 1589, he had already completed a new version which the General had sent to the Pope for approval, to be on the safe side. In 1591, the practical part regarding the studies was also ready.

In the end, the Ratio was sent to the provinces in the autumn of 1591, but with a

noteworthy peculiarity: only the practical part regarding the studies was included in the published version. The *Selection of Opinions* was sent out a year later, in 1592, as a simple manuscript in a separate treatment entitled *Speculative Part*, very much reduced and with directives which were more general. Evidently the purpose was to avoid new conflicts with the Spanish Inquisition.

The portions regarding studies had been completely transformed with a series of precise rules for the authorities, for those responsible for the different disciplines, and for the students. In an appendix were added particular norms for the individual provinces and an example of the development (*praelectio*) for a humanities programme.

The part of the new Ratio of 1591 which referred to students was sent to the provinces on an experimental basis for a period of three years. The speculative part, in contrast, was promulgated as obligatory and definitive. Very few copies of this Ratio were printed as well which, as was the custom, succumbed to the pyromaniacal tendencies of the epoch, once the final version was published in 1599.

The Ratio of 1591 was a much more elaborate and convincing document. This does not mean that all the provinces embraced it with too much enthusiasm, either the speculative part or the practical. The speculative section did not gain the assent of all, and the practical was too long and repetitive. At once, observations began to arrive in Rome. Complaints rained down from Spain, Belgium, Austria Germany, Poland, even from Italy. The provinces complained that, in spite of everything, the particular situation of each country had not been sufficiently taken into account. It was felt that a document on this matter, applicable to the whole Society, was impractical.

In 1593, the Fifth General Congregation convened. One of its first decisions was to name a commission for the revision of the Ratio, presided over by Robert Bellarmine, the

Rector of the Roman College. Surprisingly, the Congregation was very decisive in the question of the liberty of opinions, which had dragged on for years: the Society should just follow the doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas. After years of work by commissions, discussions, lists, and more lists of obligatory and free propositions, the question was settled in a brief decree. As to the practical part regarding studies, the Congregation reflected the great diversity which existed in the provinces. The Congregation had to recognize the wisdom of St Ignatius in the *Constitutions* that accommodation be made to place and time and persons.

### The definitive *Ratio* 1599

The *Ratio* of 1591 was still on an experimental basis. Yet it seemed that the process of elaboration and re-elaboration of documents and more documents was finally reaching its end. After the Fifth General Congregation, Aquaviva entrusted to a commission of three Italian fathers the definitive revision of the document, from the entire arsenal of rules, norms, resolutions, suggestions, opinions, and observations, accumulated over such a long period of time. The work of the commission lasted three years (1595-98).

Finally, the definitive document was made public. It was the first days of the year 1599. The speculative part had been omitted but a catalogue was added of the doctrine which the professors of theology and sacred scripture were to follow. The appendix referring to the particular norms for the provinces was also omitted, a matter which was referred to the discretion of the General. A few other rules were also added. The work had been completed.

The first edition was printed in Naples in 1599. A multitude of other editions followed. The text approved and promulgated by General Aquaviva was slightly retouched by the Seventh General Congregation (1616) and remained in effect without any change for 174 years until the suppression of the Society in

1773. The 'treatise' which Ignatius had announced in the *Constitutions* to give 'order and method' to the studies of the Society had a long and laborious gestation. But it had finally seen the light of day.

### The men of the *Ratio*

The *Ratio* of 1599 and the versions which preceded it were not the work of any one person, not even of a commission, but rather the result of a collective work in which many teams and individual persons participated, many of them unknown, throughout the entire second half of the sixteenth century.

For half a century, from the first *Constitutions of the College of Messina* in 1548, passing through the *Ratio Borgia* of 1565, through to the *Ratio* of 1586 and 1591, a multitude of theologians, philosophers, humanists, and other experts took part in the construction of the *Plan of Studies of the Society of Jesus* finally published in 1599. Claudio Aquaviva, whose name is associated with the *Ratio*, was the one who, beginning in 1581, urged on the last steps of the process, widened consultation and experimentation, sped up the redaction, and finally promulgated the definitive version.

The true authorship of the *Ratio* corresponds to a few Jesuits of the first generation, contemporaries of Ignatius, and a larger group of Jesuits of the second generation. We recognize the names of several of these co-authors. We will point out only those who, in our judgement, played a more important role.

Among the oldest documents which serve as a basis for the *Ratio* are those composed by Juan Polanco, the secretary of Ignatius, which were used by the founder in the preparation of the *Constitutions*.

Next comes Jerome Nadal whose educational programme in Messina marked the starting point in the entire process of the construction of the *Ratio* itself. Among those who worked with Nadal on the plan of studies in Messina

and put it into practice, we must mention the humanist André des Freux (Frusius), Isidoro Bellini, Hannibal du Coudret (Codrettus), all former students in Paris, besides Peter Canisius, Cornelius Wischaven and Benedetto Palmio. As regards the rules for students, Diego Laínez made an important contribution.

Among the theologians who most influenced the *Ratio*, Diego de Ledesma, the first prefect of the Roman College and confidant of Francis Borgia, was the most celebrated and the one who was most responsible for the theological orientation of the successive revisions. His position on the question of liberty of opinion in the teaching of theology was one of the strictest. Ledesma was not known particularly for his humanistic spirit, so we should be grateful that the humanistic part of Borgia's *Ratio* took into account the opinion of a good humanist such as Pedro Perpinyà.

A role of the first order in later versions of the *Ratio* was played by the renowned humanist Stefano Tucci, the worthy successor of Ledesma as regards theological orthodoxy. In considering the question of liberty of opinion, Acquaviva also consulted Robert Bellarmine, Alfonso Salmerón and Juan Maldonado, all of these with a more open mind set and whose opinions held great weight.

The six experts named by Acquaviva for the revision of the *Ratio* in 1586 were Juan Azor (Spain), Gaspar Gonçalves (Portugal), James Tyry (Tirus, Scotland), Petrus Buys (Busaeus, Flanders), Antoine Guise (Belgium) and Stefano Tucci (Italy). The three fathers appointed for the revision of the *Ratio* of 1591 were Stefano Tucci, Juan Azor and Gaspar Gonçalves. Finally, the team for the revision of the *Ratio* of 1599 was comprised of the Italians Ieronimo Brunelli, Fillipo Rinaldi and, probably, Orazio Torsellini.

But if it were necessary to mention one collective author of the *Ratio*, no doubt this distinction would go to the Roman College in recognition of the leading role which it played

both in the theoretical systematization and the concrete practice.

### 3 The contents of the *Ratio*

#### The rules

'A comprehensive programme for our course of studies' are the first words of the letter of Secretary Domenichi, promulgating the *Ratio*. Next and without much of a preface, follows a succession of rules for the different persons responsible and the other actors in the educational process, one after another. In all there are thirty rules, with a total of not less than 467 articles. Everything related to educational life is regulated to the smallest detail: the governance of the schools, the selection of the professors, the admission of the students, the programmes of studies, the authors and texts, the methodology, scholastic and extra-curricular activities, religious formation, discipline, rewards and punishments, time schedules, vacations.

A simple reading of the *Ratio* may be deceptive for someone who is searching in it for grand pedagogical principles. Much of its contents seem today picturesque and anachronistic. Taken out of their context, they lend themselves to humorous commentaries and can be subjected to a superficial critique. The *Ratio* has been criticized for its lack of a general vision of education, or for the absence of declaration of principle, but in order to pass judgement upon it, one must be aware of the spirit with which it was written.

It must not be forgotten that the *Ratio* is, in a sense, a prolongation of Part IV of the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus. It is the famous 'separate document' promised there by Ignatius. It is within this perspective that this document should be read and understood, in the framework of the *Constitutions* and in the light of the *Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. The Jesuits to whom it



was directed had before their eyes this frame of reference and did not need to be reminded of it. They were not asking for a pedagogical treatise but rather practical orientations for their concrete work.

The *Ratio* is not a theoretical treatise but an eminently practical manual which describes 'our way of proceeding' in education. To read the *Ratio* without this perspective is to fall into the illusion that it is only a tedious scholastic rule book with an unending stream of details, minutiae and exhausting repetition. Nevertheless, although much of the practical detail is out of fashion today, much of its content continues to be valid.

### The 'pedagogy of the Jesuits' in the *Ratio*

It would be out of place to pretend to offer a complete picture of the *Ratio*. We will limit ourselves simply to tracing roughly some of the most characteristic elements of the 'pedagogy of the Jesuits' as it is reflected in the *Ratio*.

The highest authority is that of the Provincial, to whom corresponds the ultimate responsibility for all that pertains to education. 'It is the principal ministry of the Society of Jesus to educate youth in every branch of knowledge that is in keeping with our Institute.'<sup>8</sup>

Under the Provincial, leading the school is the Rector, assisted by a Prefect of Higher Studies (for the studies of philosophy and theology) and a Prefect of Lower Studies (for the classes of rhetoric, humanities and grammar). The Rector is, without exception, nominated by the General according to the *Constitutions*. In this, the Society distanced itself from the prevailing norms of that era, especially in the universities of the Italian style, where the Rector was elected.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Provincial n.1

Next is considered the faculty, composed entirely of Jesuits. Nevertheless, the document insists, curiously, on the necessity that the professors be carefully selected and well formed. Nothing strange, if one recalls the boom of schools and the scarcity of capable personnel had forced the Society to make do with young professors. The constant switching of Jesuit schoolmasters and their lack of preparation had occasioned numerous complaints by families and ruined the reputation of not a few schools. The theme of the formation of the Jesuits in the face of the escalating demands of the schools is not far removed from the overall problem of the number of the professed and non-professed in the Order. A controversy arose in parallel regarding the poverty of the schools, and whether or not the schools were the specific ministry of the Society and in conformity with the mind of the founder.

Certain requirements needed to be followed for the admission of the students, including an examination to know the extent of their previous studies and to place the student in the corresponding class. The division of students into classes and the progression in the studies to the extent that the exams were passed is a characteristic norm. There are noble students who are given 'the choicer seats' (in class each student has a fixed seat). But there is no discrimination according to social class in the admission process: 'he must not, however, refuse anyone admission because of poverty or inferior social status.'<sup>9</sup> The Jesuit schools should be endowed with a foundation or be able to count on fixed incomes sufficient to make them accessible to all. At the door of the recently inaugurated Roman College (1551) a sign declared that instruction was given 'gratis'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Prefect of Lower Studies n.9

<sup>10</sup> Tradition has it that Ignatius himself wrote out the sign to go above the door of the new Roman College (1551): 'Schola di grammatica, d' humanità, dottrina Christiana, gratis' ('A school of grammar, humanities and Christian doctrine, free.').

The course of studies<sup>11</sup> began with three years of grammar (low, middle, high), one year of humanities, and one of rhetoric. But the time which each student would remain in a course could vary according to his own pace. According to the *Constitutions*, reading and writing was ordinarily not taught.<sup>12</sup> This also explains why for centuries the Society did not become involved in elementary education.

Classical studies, based upon the Graeco-Latin culture predominant in the Renaissance, were the basis of the curriculum. Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew, were the languages to be gradually acquired. A mastery of Latin was imperative and generalized to the point that the students were denounced and punished when they had failed to speak in it at the appointed times. The use of the vernacular language was in large part repressed to favour the mastery of Latin.

A curious selection of the best authors guaranteed the quality of the classical formation, more the ancient than the modern authors. In Latin, Cicero, Caesar, Salustius, Titus Livius, Virgil (excluding the *Eclogues* and the loves of Dido and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*), and Horatius (selected Odes) were the preferred authors. Much care was given to expurgate the authors to omit all obscenity. For years, already during the life of Ignatius, the propriety of studying the good pagan authors (or the works of Christians of suspect doctrines such as Erasmus) was debated. The Solomonic solution was to make use of them 'as of the spoils of Egypt.'

The goal of a humanistic formation was the classical man, well-balanced and fully developed in all his faculties, inspired along

the lines of the Graeco-Latin authors, enhanced by the Christian dimension as well. In a very famous expression, to reach perfect eloquence (*eloquentia perfecta*)<sup>13</sup> which meant not only being able to speak, to write and to communicate one's own ideas with facility and elegance, but also having the capacity to reason, to feel, to express oneself and to act, harmonizing virtue with learning. In a word, the integral formation and style of life along the lines of what today we would call human excellence. In philosophy and theology the question of proficiency (*mediocritas*) and the qualities or talents required to go on to higher studies and to possible responsibilities of governance were a theme of discussion in the Society for centuries.

After rhetoric followed three years of philosophy and four of theology. In philosophy Aristotle was the prescribed author, as was St Thomas in theology. After the long debate about the doctrine which the Society ought to defend in its teaching, the *Ratio* did not enter into further detail. St Thomas was the author who ought to be followed by obligation to such an extent that those who were little fond of him had to withdraw from their teaching posts. But St Thomas did not have to be followed slavishly to the point of never deviating from his doctrine: 'The members of the Society therefore should not be more strictly bound to him than the Thomists themselves.'<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the students of theology were permitted to depart from the opinions of their teachers, and to defend their own in public acts, on condition they were well founded – and did not depart from the teaching of St Thomas, of course!<sup>15</sup>

A technique specific to the lower classes is the *praelectio* which consists of a specific way of

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<sup>11</sup> 'It is the principal ministry of the Society of Jesus to educate youth in every branch of knowledge that is in keeping with its Institute. The aim of our educational programme is to lead men to the knowledge and love of our Creator and Redeemer. The Provincial should therefore make every effort to ensure that the various curricula in our schools produce the results which our vocation demands of us.' *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Provincial n.1

<sup>12</sup> *Constitutions* n.451

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<sup>13</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Professor of Rhetoric n.1

<sup>14</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Professor of Scholastic Theology n.2

<sup>15</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Professor of Scholastic Theology n.10

expounding the text of an author. The professor begins with a brief summary or synthetic presentation of the topic, and continues by breaking up and analysing the entire contexts of the text, explaining and commenting upon it from all angles: words, phrases, its correct translation, grammatical rules, style, image, background and form, historical context, characters, significance, etc. The *praelectio* forced the students to become accustomed to not merely passing superficially over the texts, or stopping at the surface, but rather to penetrate deeply into the work and to growing in maturity in their judgement and in their personality.

The timetables were intense: 2 to 2½ hours in the morning, and as much in the afternoon, not counting the time dedicated to study and scholastic exercises. The vacations were neither less than one month nor more than two in the higher studies, and were reduced by half this for the lower courses, down to only a week for the poor students in the lowest grades. Besides Sunday, there was one other weekly day of rest, either Wednesday or Thursday. Thursday prevailed in the century-old tradition of the Society. Saturdays were days dedicate to repetitions of the lectures of the week, to the recitation of the catechism, and to scholastic debates.

Frequent and abundant exercise is one of the characteristics of the pedagogy of the *Ratio*. The activities carried out in class had a group character to them, with intense interaction among the students. The types of exercises were extremely varied: writing, descriptions, imitation of authors, compositions in prose and in verse, transcriptions from prose to verse and *vice versa*, translations, recitations, declamations, discourses, repetitions, vocabulary drills, *disputationes* (a type of scholastic debate with arguments pro and con), written examinations, oral examinations, public functions, etc. These are some of the activities which kept the students active at every moment, with continuous demands upon their intelligence, memory, imagination and feelings. Practice and usage were more

important than the rules. It was most definitely a pedagogy eminently active and interactive.

Other extra-curricular activities rounded out the day, among them the Academies. These came to be like study clubs, formed by selected students who would meet on Sundays or holidays to practice and cultivate their hobbies, delving deeper into topics related to their studies.

Theatrical presentations were greatly cared for from the very beginning – the famous Jesuit theatre also had a place in the *Ratio*. It specified, however, that tragedies and comedies be given rarely, in Latin, about pious themes, and without any female costumes or characters. In this case the practice also went far beyond the law, and soon became highly developed.

Emulation was another typical element of Jesuit pedagogy, reaching almost mythical proportions by the way it was interpreted. In the lower classes, each student had a peer (*aemulus*) for mutual stimulation in scholastic exercises, specially correcting each other's homework and going over the repetitions of the lessons.

Each class was divided into two groups. Each one had its own officers who took the names of the Roman magistrates (emperors, consuls, tribunes, etc.). The groups competed among themselves and the student leaders in each group occupied the first seats. Every one or two months the officers were rotated.

One particular exercise was the *concertatio* or a contest in which the rivals responded to certain questions, or the two groups competed among themselves, or else an individual would challenge another who was in a higher rank from him. The objective is 'so that honourable rivalry which is a powerful incentive to studies may be fostered.'<sup>16</sup> It is

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<sup>16</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Lower Class Teacher n.31

an echo of the 'holy rivalry' of which St Ignatius also spoke.<sup>17</sup>

Within this pattern, rewards and punishments also play a role and were the object of special rules. In each class, the students were divided into *decuriae* or groups of ten. Within each of these there was a Decurion, a type of professor's assistant whose duty was to take the memory lesson of his fellow students.

In each class there was also someone in charge of discipline, known as the Chief Decurion (censor, praetor), who had the privilege of imposing punishments upon his companions, interceding for them, and reporting the faults committed in the presence or the absence of the professor.

When warnings did not suffice, sanctions followed. However, no professor could apply corporal punishment, otherwise common at that time, neither were they allowed to insult or humiliate a student. The Jesuits would turn them over to the secular authorities: an external corrector, not a Jesuit, especially paid, who had the exclusive responsibility for applying sanctions. But the *Ratio* wisely notes that 'faithful observance will be better served by the hope of honour and rewards and the fear of disgrace than by corporal punishment.'<sup>18</sup>

Attention to the person reveals itself throughout the *Ratio*, although the expression *cura personalis*<sup>19</sup> or other similar terms do not

formally appear in the *Ratio* in any particular place. The *Ratio* not only asks the professor to pray for his students and meet with them in private sessions, but, significantly, it also recommends that 'he must not regard anyone with contempt but assist the efforts of the poor as much those of the rich. He should seek the advancement of each and every one of his charges.'<sup>20</sup>

A special rule gives norms for prizes, which were conferred once a year. Written contexts were held in diverse disciplines, in which the students participated anonymously. A panel judged the works and announced the names of all the winners, who were awarded prizes with all solemnity.

As can be supposed, attention to the teaching of Christian doctrine and religious formation, as well as the practices of piety, occupy a pride of place in the *Ratio*. Daily Mass, prayer, the examination of conscience in the evenings, the frequent reception of the sacraments, devotion to Our Lady, weekly exhortations to the students, pious lectures, sermons on feast days and various devotions mark the entire *Ratio*. Each class begins with a brief prayer given by a student, which the professor and students listen to on their knees. The teachers are advised to have private colloquies with the students in order to impress upon them the virtues. One of the means most recommended are the Marian Sodalties which are to be established in each school for the students who aspire to a deeper spiritual life. Being a member of a congregation is a prerequisite for taking part in an academy.

In summary, joining piety and letters is the result hoped for in the students.<sup>21</sup> The study

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how the subject of the *cura personalis* began to spread throughout the English-speaking world.

<sup>20</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Lower Class Teacher n.50

<sup>21</sup> 'The teacher shall so train the youths entrusted to the Society's care that they may acquire not only learning but also habits of conduct worthy of a Christian. He should endeavour both in the classroom and outside to train the impressionable minds of his pupils in the loving

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<sup>17</sup> cf. *Constitutions* n.383

<sup>18</sup> *Ratio Studiorum*, Rules for the Lower Class Teacher n.39

<sup>19</sup> The expression *cura personalis* (attention or care to the person) does not come from Ignatius, nor does it appear in the earliest writings of the Society. It seems to be the modern equivalent of an attitude which certainly is very characteristic of Ignatius and the Society: 'prudence suited to places and persons', 'the circumstances of the persons', 'the diversity of persons and natures', etc. We find it (for the first time?) in the Instruction of Father General Vlodimir Ledóchowski on the universities and colleges of the American Assistancy (15<sup>th</sup> August 1934): *Personalis alumnorum cura* (n.7.2) and in the Instruction revised by Father General John Baptist Janssens (27<sup>th</sup> September 1948). This explains

of the liberal arts in a Jesuit school had no other goal than the service of God and others.

### *'Our way of proceeding'* in education

We are not going to pronounce a critical judgement on the *Ratio* of 1599, its undeniable successes and its deficiencies. Numerous historians and pedagogues have already done that. Nothing can replace the direct consultation and study of the rich literature which exists on the matter to form one's own idea of what the *Ratio* was and what it meant in the history of the Society.

We would argue simply that the *Ratio*, with its positive and negative aspects, and with the qualities and defects of the Jesuits who put it into practice, allowed for the organization of an educational system and the implantation of a pedagogical practice which perhaps has never been duplicated in world history. Whatever may be one's judgement of the *Ratio* and the pedagogy of the Jesuits, it is undeniable that both have made their mark in the history of culture and education.

For Jesuits and for those who are committed to the educational mission of the Society, the *Ratio* has another special feature: that of being a concrete historical expression, applied to the field of education, of what Ignatius of Loyola called 'our way of proceeding'.

## 4 Four centuries later

### A failed attempt: the *Ratio* of 1832

Suppressed in 1773, the Society, once restored in 1814, immediately resumed its educational labours. It first seemed obvious that the schools would return to the famous *Ratio Studiorum*. But, since the French Revolution, the world was no longer the

same. The birth of the modern states implied radically distinct tactics in the educational field. This was especially true in the states formed according to the Napoleonic model, which promoted the state school and assumed control of education. To think of a uniform plan of studies, commonly acceptable in all countries, was thereafter an illusion.

General Congregation 20, the first of the restored Society (1820), decreed 'the adaptation of the *Ratio Studiorum* to our times.'

An attempt was made to revise the *Ratio* to conform to the national educational systems. General Jan Roothan strongly supported drafting a new *Ratio*, which appeared in 1832. Sent to the provinces, it suffered even a worse fate than its predecessors of the sixteenth century: more than ever it was impossible to prepare a document which would be universally valid for the entire Society. The Jesuits ran the risk of pursuing their own plan of studies, in parallel with the secular legislation in effect and without official recognition.

Besides, the contents were obsolete. Continuing teaching according to the classical ideas of renaissance humanism, in a world in which the scientific disciplines, the national languages and modern authors were gaining ever more importance, was to go against the current of history.

The *Ratio* of 1832 was stillborn. In 1906, General Congregation 25 declined to impose a common *Ratio* for all the schools of the Society, given the variety of secular legislation in effect. In practice, it was left to the provincials to see how to apply the *Ratio*. The same Congregation had to admit that the study of non-classical authors 'is not contrary to our Institute.'<sup>22</sup> This one declaration speaks for itself of the change which had occurred.

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service of God and in all the virtues required for this service. Common rules for the teacher of the lower classes n.1

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<sup>22</sup> General Congregation 25, Decree 12.4



Realistically, the Catholic school was giving way to state pressure. In order to ensure recognition by the state, Jesuit schools in Europe were gradually accommodating their programmes and methods to the requirements of the ministries of education.

In other countries, such as the United States, in which one enjoyed more liberty and there was not the same pressure from the state, the schools were shaping their own model of a Catholic and Jesuit school, inserted into the surrounding culture. Several of the schools were distancing themselves from the mythical *Ratio*, of which only external symbolic elements remained. Sometimes the old terminology was used, such as classes of grammar, poetry, rhetoric, humanities, but the words were losing their original meaning. The Jesuit educational system seemed to have been installed in as many different models as countries. What still gave a unity was not a common document but a spirit.

### From the *Ratio* to the *Characteristics*

Let us make a jump in history. The memory of the last few years is too fresh in our minds to need repeating. Since the excitement of the Council<sup>23</sup> and the institutional crisis of the 1960s and 70s, which particularly affected the education, the Society entered in a new path. The apostolic works of the Society, among them education, entered a process of profound revision, in order to accommodate itself to the new formulation of the mission expressed by the General Congregation 32 (1975).

The need to give a sense of unity to the educational apostolate was felt in all parts, not by means of a new pedagogical code, but by the adherence to certain common principles and ways of doing things.

Thus was born, in 1986, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*. Fruit of the work of many

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<sup>23</sup> The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) – a meeting of all the Catholic bishops of the world.

teams, and consultations much more agile than those of four centuries ago, the *Characteristics* do not pretend to be a new *Ratio*, but rather seek to give a common vision and a sense of purpose to education in the Society. In 1993 was published *Ignatian Pedagogy – A Practical Approach*, which offers a model for the application of the *Characteristics* to the concrete terrain of the classroom, by means of a practical pedagogy inspired by the *Exercises*.

The merit of the *Characteristics*, which is only a working instrument, consists in having a sense of unity to education in the Society, not through a plan of common studies but by springing from the fundamental Ignatian inspiration. This inspiration was, without doubt, latent in the *Ratio*. But perhaps never as much as today has it become clear that the *raison d'être* of education in the Society is rooted in the vision of Ignatius, and in the mission of the Society, in the framework of a four-century old spiritual and pedagogical inheritance.

Once again, the Society is trying to be faithful to the wise principle of adaptation 'to places, times and persons'.<sup>24</sup> And, under the inspiration of Ignatius, it is attempting to serve the Lord and to help souls in the field of education, according to 'our way of proceeding'.

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<sup>24</sup> This phrase is frequently used by St Ignatius in the *Constitutions* (eg. n.455) and elsewhere and articulates the important principle of adaptation to local circumstances that was a striking feature of Jesuit ministries.

## Appendix 1

### The *Ratio Studiorum* – Table of Contents

1. Rules of the Provincial
2. Rules of the Rector
3. Rules of the Prefect of Studies
4. Rules of Professors of the Higher Faculties
5. Rules of the Professor of Sacred Scripture
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7. Rules of the Professor of Scholastic Theology
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31. Catalogue of some questions from St Thomas' *Prima*

## Appendix 2

### Rules for Extern Students

1. Those who attend the schools of the Society of Jesus in pursuit of learning should be convinced that, with God's help, we shall make as great effort to advance them in the love of God and all other virtues as we shall do to perfect them in the liberal arts.
2. Each student will attend the class to which, after examination, he shall be assigned by the Prefect of Studies.
3. They shall go to confession at least once a month, assist at daily Mass at the time appointed, and be present in a becoming manner at the sermon on feast days.
4. They shall attend the weekly instructions in Christian doctrine and learn the lessons in the textbook assigned by the teacher.
5. None of our students shall enter the school with weapons, daggers, knives, or anything else which may be forbidden by reason of place or circumstances.
6. Students must never indulge in swearing, ridicule, insult, detraction, falsehood or forbidden games. They must keep away from places of ill repute and from such as have been proscribed by the Prefect. In short, they should not do anything that is contrary to good morals.
7. They should understand that the teachers may employ the corrector to punish them when in matters concerning discipline or studies, commands and warnings are of no avail. Those who refuse to accept the punishments or do not give promise of reform or are troublesome to others or set a bad example shall be expelled from the school.
8. All must obey their teachers and must faithfully follow in class and at home the plan and method of study prescribed for them.
9. Pupils must apply themselves seriously and consistently to their studies; they must be prompt and regular in coming to class, and faithful in paying attention to the prelections, in repeating the matter explained, and in performing the tasks assigned. If there is anything they do not clearly understand or are in doubt about, they should seek the assistance of the teacher.
10. In the classroom they should not move about but each must remain in the place assigned him and be well behaved and quietly intent on his own work. No one is to leave the classroom without permission of the teacher. All disfiguring or marking of benches, the professor's chair, seats, walls, doors windows or other furniture by drawing, writing, or carving is strictly forbidden.

11. They should shun the company of those whose conduct is immoral or even questionable, and they should associate only with those whose example in studies and in conduct may help them.
12. They should refrain altogether from reading pernicious as well as worthless books.
13. They may not attend public spectacles, comedies, plays, or public executions of criminals except those of heretics. They must not take part in theatricals outside the school without obtaining the permission of their teachers or the Prefect of Studies.
14. All should strive to preserve sincerity of soul and purity of conscience and be especially exacting in their observance of the divine law. They should frequently and sincerely commend themselves to God, to the Blessed Mother of God, to the other saints, and earnestly implore the protection of the angels, in particular of their guardian angel. They should behave well at all times and in all places, but especially in church and in the classroom.
15. Finally, let them so conduct themselves in word and action that everyone may easily understand that they are no less earnest in acquiring virtue and integrity of life than in making progress in learning.



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Extra footnotes have been added for clarification

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